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*Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188*

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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 18 May 2015		2. REPORT TYPE FINAL		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE BALTIC COIN: Using a counterinsurgency model to counter Russian Hybrid warfare in the Baltics.				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Lieutenant Commander Ryan Vest Paper Advisor: Colonel Adrian Schuettke				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Joint Military Operations Department Naval War College 686 Cushing Road Newport, RI 02841-1207				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited. Reference: DOD Directive 5230.24					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the Naval War College faculty in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.					
14. ABSTRACT EUCOM and NATO commanders today face a new threat in Eastern Europe in the form of Russian hybrid warfare, as recently seen in Crimea and the Ukraine. As EUCOM and NATO planners develop operational contingency plans for hybrid warfare in this theater, the tenets of counterinsurgency provide a logical framework for a successful operational design. This paper examines how commanders and their staffs can utilize battle proven COIN design tenets to counter the current Russian ideas of hybrid warfare. It also delves into the efficacy of Article V of the NATO charter and how it will affect the NATO timeline for response should Russia instigate hybrid war in the Baltics.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Russia, Hybrid warfare, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, NATO					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:		17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON	
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED			c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED	17
				19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) 401-841-3556	

**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.**

BALTIC COIN:
Using a counterinsurgency model to counter Russian hybrid warfare in the Baltics

by

Ryan G. Vest

Lieutenant Commander, United States Navy

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

18 May 2015

Paper Abstract

EUCOM and NATO commanders today face a new threat in Eastern Europe in the form of Russian hybrid warfare, as recently seen in Crimea and the Ukraine. As EUCOM and NATO planners develop operational contingency plans for hybrid warfare in this theater, the tenets of counterinsurgency provide a logical framework for a successful operational design. This paper examines how commanders and their staffs can utilize battle proven COIN design tenets to counter the current Russian ideas of hybrid warfare. This paper also delves into the efficacy of Article V of the NATO charter and how it will affect the NATO timeline for response should Russia instigate hybrid war in the Baltics.

Over the course of the last decade, conflict in the EUCOM theater has shifted toward non-lethal forms of aggression that are being used in combination with traditional lethal military force, a combination that is increasingly labeled hybrid warfare. U.S. and NATO commanders today face a very real and significant threat that does not have a well established doctrinal response. Although hybrid warfare is not necessarily a form of insurgency, if EUCOM and NATO commanders act while the conflict is still in its non-lethal stages, they can effectively use the tools developed for counterinsurgency (COIN) to respond to early stage hybrid warfare, which may span the spectrum of non-lethal means from strategic communications, propaganda, cyber attack and engineered social unrest to special forces operations and the use of unmanned drones. For these responses to be effective, it is important that commanders recognize early stage hybrid warfare, and respond proportionately and appropriately before the conflict develops into a more traditional armed conflict. This is especially true in response to Russia's new methods of armed conflict, tested and refined in Georgia, Crimea and the Ukraine - a form of hybrid warfare that is causing concern to Eastern European NATO states who are unsure if western powers will be willing to act in collective defense to non-traditional forms of attack.

If Russia continues this pattern of aggression, EUCOM and NATO commanders can expect to see it reprised in the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, all relatively recent additions to NATO that in the past fell within the Russian sphere of influence. In Russia's recent incursions into Crimea and the Ukraine, one of the primary factors that President Putin used to both enable and justify Russian aggression was the presence of a large ethnic Russian minority that he asserted were being repressed. Looking at NATO member nations in the Baltics, it is easy to see parallels in every country, as they all have

sizable Russian minorities, but most notably the Estonian county of Ida-Viru, centered around the city of Narva, where ethnic Russians make up 70% of the population.¹ As Ida-Viru shares a border with Russia, this north-east corner of Estonia is ripe for conflict and would be a logical bridge into the Baltics. Looking at this area of Estonia (and equally as strategically important and exploitable, the south-eastern provinces of Latvia with their high population density of ethnic Russians) can help NATO planners create specific, detailed plans for the next stage of hybrid warfare in Eastern Europe.

As EUCOM and NATO planners develop the operational design for defense of the Baltics against Russian aggression, utilization of the tenets of COIN can provide a basic foundation for the concept of operations. Planners should emphasize understanding the operational environment and the peculiarities of Russia's brand of hybrid warfare, using COIN principles to counter this system of aggression and understand the importance of taking decisive action at the right time to blunt the attack before it develops into a conventional armed conflict.

Understanding the Operational Environment

The first tenet of COIN is understanding the operational environment, and this is a rational starting point to counter a hybrid warfare threat. A fundamental understanding of the root causes of unrest in Eastern Europe along with a firm understanding of Russian motivations in the region are essential for NATO planners to properly respond to aggression.

¹ Kalev Katus, Allan Puur and Asta Põldma. "Reviewed population vital and census statistics 1965-1990." Statistical Office of Estonia. Tallinn, 2002.

Although it is easy to place blame for tensions in Eastern Europe on Vladimir Putin and Russia, this conflict is not by any stretch a Russian invention. Henry Kissinger very aptly observed, “For the West, the demonization of Vladimir Putin is not a policy; it is an alibi for the absence of one.”² Instead the conflict must be viewed as a problem of differing national interests of competing powers exacerbated by a lack of communication and mutual understanding. Indeed, Kissinger aptly observed that, “Understanding U.S. values and psychology are not [Putin’s] strong suits. Nor has understanding Russian history and psychology been a strong point of U.S. policymakers.”³

During the Cold War, Russia, as the heart of the Soviet Union, built a very successful and secure strategic defensive position deep in Eastern Europe. The Soviet Republic of Russia only bordered one non-communist state (neutral Finland) and a total of only four states not part of the Soviet Union (Finland, Mongolia, China and North Korea.) The other 14 Soviet Republics created an insular buffer zone around the mother republic, keeping foreign interests at arms length. Additionally, the Soviet government brought the surrounding Eastern European states under their control, adding a second buffer ring between Russia and the west, giving Russia strategic depth on all sides that formed the foundation for their defensive posture against the West.

The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 gave rise to sweeping reforms across Eastern Europe that significantly changed the structure of the Russian defensive position. The 90s featured a mass exodus of nations once loyal to Russia falling out of Russian orbit. In 1999, The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joined NATO, encroaching on Russia’s outer

² Henry Kissinger, “To settle the Ukraine crisis, start at the end.” *The Washington Post*. March 5, 2014.

³ Ibid.

defensive ring, bringing the Western alliance uncomfortably close to Russia.⁴ In 2004, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia - and most alarmingly - the former Soviet Republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined the alliance, for the first time bringing NATO right up to the Russian border, potentially allowing U.S. troops to approach within 100 miles of Russia's second largest city unhindered.⁵ Russia, weakened militarily and economically in the decade after the fall of the Soviet Union, could only watch helplessly from the sidelines as NATO expansion marched right up to their doorstep.⁶

From Moscow's viewpoint, it is not difficult to see how NATO expansion could be perceived as aggression on the part of the west, stealing the loyalties of nations that had been part of the Russian sphere of influence. This encroachment upset a balance that had held for decades and could position potentially hostile forces uncomfortably close to Russia's borders. In 2008, when NATO promised eventual membership to Georgia and the Ukraine, the issue reached critical mass.⁷ Using a foolish Georgian campaign to reconquer the ethnic minority in South Ossetia as an excuse to act, Russia began a campaign to protect her regional interests, in what Russian strategic communications commonly refer to as the "near abroad," from U.S. and European influence.⁸

⁴ NATO official website. "A short history of NATO."

⁵ Janis Berzins. "Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defense Policy." *National Defense Academy of Latvia, Center for Security and Strategic Research*. Policy Paper No. 2. April 2014.

⁶ Charles Kupchan, "NATO's Final Frontier: Why Russia should join the Atlantic Alliance." *Foreign Affairs*. May/June 2010 issue.

⁷ Ruhle, Michael. "NATO enlargement and Russia: myths and realities." *NATO Review Magazine*.

⁸ Charles King, "The Five-Day War." *Foreign Affairs*. November/December 2008 issue.

To understand President Putin's motives, U.S. and allied planners need to look back at the last 20 years of Russian history to put the present crisis into perspective. In his State of the Nation address in 2005, Putin stated that the collapse of the Soviet Union "was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century,"⁹ a statement that western analysts and reporters have used to paint him as a neo-communist dictator. But, he went on to clarify his remarks, that "for the Russian people, it became a genuine tragedy. Tens of millions of our fellow citizens and countrymen found themselves beyond the fringes of Russian territory."¹⁰ It is clear that even in 2005, Putin's real concern was about ethnic Russian populations isolated outside the boundaries of the Russian Federation when the Soviet Union collapsed.

In the last decade, as Russian regional power and ambition has grown, Russian military thinking has been strongly influenced by world events outside of the traditional military realm. The Russian military is examining war through a new lens, and has been using small conflicts on its borders as a testing ground for new military theories. In February of 2013, The Chief of Staff of the Russian Army, General Valeri Gerasimov, wrote (under the heading, "Lessons of the Arab Spring") "The role of non-military force in the achievement of political and strategic objectives has increased, which in a series of recent cases has greatly surpassed the armed forces in its effectiveness. The emphasis on the methods used in confrontation have shifted toward the widespread use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian and other non-military measures, implemented by *taking advantage of the protest potential of the population.*"¹¹[Emphasis added.]

⁹ Associated press. "Putin: Soviet collapse a 'genuine tragedy.'" April 25, 2005.

¹⁰ Associated press. "Putin: Soviet collapse a 'genuine tragedy.'"

¹¹ Gerasimov, Valeri. "The Value of Science for the Future." *Military-Industrial Courier No. 8 (476)* February 27, 2013.

General Gerasimov's concept of new methods of warfare - what we have come to loosely describe as hybrid warfare - seeks to utilize traditional conventional warfare as a late phase form of conflict that follows extensive non-lethal means. His vision of new warfare methods seeks to first leverage diplomatic, legal, political, economic, psychological and ideological forms of strategic communication, simultaneously aimed at Russian minorities within neighboring states, the opposing government and the international community.¹² This would be followed by intimidation and destabilizing propaganda to pave the way for the arrival of Russian militants and agitators to stir up the Russian speaking population in civil unrest.¹³ Under this concept, conventional attack is highly unlikely until the conflict has matured significantly, especially against NATO member states.

Within a year of publishing his thoughts, the Russian Army used all of the non-lethal measures General Gerasimov laid out in his article. This new warfare held up remarkably well both in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. The non-traditional forms of combat caught the West unprepared, and by the time Western governments were able to react, they had few political or military courses of action available, none desirable.¹⁴

This new style of warfare is disconcerting to the Baltic Republics on many levels. For one, it doesn't fit neatly into any model previously devised, although it is generally shoe-horned into the bin of hybrid warfare because it fuses traditionally separate types of conflict that span the range of the operational spectrum of war.¹⁵ The NATO alliance, built upon the

¹² Gerasimov, Valeri. "The Value of Science for the Future."

¹³ Janis Berzins. "Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine."

¹⁴ Charles Doran and Jakub Grygiel. "Sanctions may push Russia to challenge the current status-quo." *National Interest*. December 29, 2014.

¹⁵ Nadia Shadlow, "The Problem with Hybrid Warfare." *War on the Rocks*. April 2, 2015.

concept of collective defense, has been left flat footed in this new environment, unsure exactly what actions would trigger NATO to act in collective defense. Nadia Shadlow, in a recent article on hybrid warfare in the Baltics notes, “In the post-Cold War period, the United States and other allies are much less comfortable responding to actions that are in the gray areas of political subversion – areas at which Russia excels.”¹⁶ She continues, “Moscow appears to be deliberately staying under the Article V threshold, while still pursuing its aggressive aims and seeking to destabilize NATO members.”¹⁷ As a result, many of our Eastern European allies lack confidence that the United States and NATO will respond to acts of war short of invasion.¹⁸

Using COIN principles to counter aggression

Janis Berzins, in a recent policy paper for the National Defense Academy of Latvia laid out the full scope of Russian hybrid warfare as an eight phase process. The first four phases encompass the Russian vision of non-lethal warfare and need to be the focus of EUCOM and NATO commanders dealing with Russian aggression in the Baltic states. These phases include phase one: non-military asymmetric warfare (strategic communications encompassing political, ideological, diplomatic, psychological, and economic forms of warfare), phase two: political and military deception, phase three: intimidation of

¹⁶ Nadia Shadlow, “The Problem with Hybrid Warfare.”

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Jonson, Pal. “The debate about Article 5 and its credibility. What is it all about?” *Research Division - NATO Defense College Rome - No. 58 - 2010.*

government and military officers, and phase four: destabilizing propaganda to foment civil unrest.¹⁹

Following General Gerasimov's model, the first phase of Russian aggression in the Baltics would take the form of strategic communications built on political, ideological, diplomatic, psychological, and economic forms of warfare. As Russia has long since mobilized its strategic communications apparatus against the Ukraine, it would be simple to redirect it onto other states in the region and U.S. and NATO staffs are already behind in this effort. The *Guardian* newspaper recently reported that Russian propagandists are working around the clock on both English and Russian language forums to promote the Kremlin's ideology. According to the report, propagandists often work in teams of two to three in highly orchestrated exchanges, promoting the Kremlin's agenda on comment boards, blogs and social media. These subversive online attacks, coupled with an orchestrated media disinformation campaign had a marked effect in Russia's campaign in Eastern Ukraine and threaten to destabilize key regions in the Baltics.²⁰

In response to Russia's early stage hybrid warfare threat, NATO forces should use the tenets of COIN as outlined in JP 3-24 to stop Russian aggression in its early stages. We have already discussed the first tenet of COIN, understanding the operational environment, in the context of the pre-conflict shaping campaign. Once Russian aggression begins in earnest, planners need to continue their shaping efforts, and utilize the second tenet of counterinsurgency, to develop their own COIN narrative.

¹⁹ Janis Berzins. "Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine."

²⁰ Shaun Walker, "Salutin Putin: Inside a Russian Troll house." *The Guardian*. London. April 2, 2015.

NATO and U.S. leaders must recognize that the theater of operations that we will work to shape is not a country or geographical area, but rather a demographic one, or as Berzins puts it, “the Russian view of modern warfare is based on the idea that the main battle-space is the mind.”²¹ It is essential to counter the Russian propaganda machine by convincing the ethnic Russian minorities in the Baltic states that they are better off in their home country than to be absorbed or occupied by Russia, and emphasize their nationality as opposed to ethnicity. A failure to connect with the minority population could open the door to political instability and upheaval orchestrated from Moscow. A coordinated western propaganda campaign coupled with a genuine effort by our partner nations to address grievances - real, or invented by Kremlin propagandists - early and show a sincere desire to include the Russian minority’s priorities in the national debate are the foundations for a successful COIN narrative.

At the operational level, NATO commanders can assist with these shaping activities through sustained presence. Developing a COIN narrative is not just a function of strategic communications - as the old adage says, actions speak louder than words. Minority populations need to see their country working together and cooperating with larger Western democracies to build a stable and just future. Joint exercises with other NATO member states can lend legitimacy to a government that may be struggling to connect with ethnic subdivisions of the population. Working with partner nation militaries in humanitarian missions and community outreach programs also has the benefit of putting a human face on allied militaries, creating lasting positive impressions of NATO and western countries.

²¹ Janis Berzins. “Russia’s New Generation Warfare in Ukraine.”

Throughout the hybrid warfare campaign, the third tenet of counterinsurgency, the primacy of politics, must be at the forefront of all U.S. and NATO plans. For EUCOM and NATO planners, deterrence operations will likely make up the bulk of political primacy at the operational level.

Large scale, multinational deterrence operations like Operation ATLANTIC RESOLVE 2015 are an excellent example of deterrence operations, however NATO commanders need to ensure that after the large exercise is complete, they continue to apply steady deterrent pressure to Russia.²² Charles Doran and Jakub Grygiel note, “Deploying a few troops hints at intent but placing heavier capability on the ground and offshore conveys genuine determination. Only the latter can strengthen the deterrent that NATO, and the U.S. in particular, have extended to its most exposed members on the eastern frontier.”²³ As much as the specific capability employed is important, it is equally as important to maintain a constant, unremitting presence with that force.

U.S. and NATO deterrence operations must be ever-present and specifically tailored to deter early stage Russian hybrid warfare aggression. Although large military exercises have an excellent military deterrent effect, as previously noted, Russia is intentionally operating below the threshold of where they believe Western powers might react militarily. An outright conventional attack on the Baltic states is highly unlikely in large part due to Western deterrence, but cyber attack, propaganda, information warfare, and civil unrest are all tools at Russia’s disposal that they will not hesitate to use unless NATO can field a

²² U.S. European Command, Operation ATLANTIC RESOLVE fact sheet, March 2015.

²³ Charles Doran and Jakub Grygiel. “Sanctions may push Russia to challenge the current status-quo.”

credible deterrence. NATO commanders must tailor deterrence operations toward discouraging phase one non-military actions by Russia in these countries.

In a great first step forward down this path, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg recently announced that NATO will consider “that a cyber-attack can also trigger collective defense, article five response... a cyber-attack can be as serious as a more conventional attack.”²⁴ In this same vein, NATO commanders need to make clear that they understand hybrid warfare and will act in retaliation against other non-lethal, non-military forms of attack against allies just like they would cyber attack.

Just as important as deterring Russian aggression, it is important that NATO countries provide a strong deterrent for the civil population, especially if unrest begins to develop. It is essential that the minority population be convinced that if they rise up against their government, they would also face the military forces of western allies. It is one thing to stand up to domestic military forces that may seem weak or inept because of propaganda and political failings of the country, but quite another to stand up to modern, battle hardened NATO forces. There is a delicate balance that must be struck of maintaining a believable deterrent posture, but at the same time, ensuring that those same western military components do not threaten, intimidate or radicalize alienated portions of the population. Convincing the minority population that any uprising would be countered by American and NATO forces, working closely with the host nation’s armed forces, would be the most effective deterrence against Russian hybrid warfare.

Through this process, we can expect Russian forces to advance to their phase two methods of political and military deception. These efforts would be designed specifically to

²⁴ Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Joint Press Conference, March 25, 2015.

challenge western political will and force NATO forces to provide Russian and insurgent forces the space they need to operate. It is essential that operational commanders understand the political aims of both sides, and carefully position forces and develop rules of engagement (ROE) to support U.S. political aims and most importantly, to avoid compromising U.S. diplomatic efforts. It is important that NATO military forces do not inadvertently provide the catalyst that allows Russia to escalate the conflict in accordance with its phased plan.

Should the conflict continue to develop, there is a strong likelihood of Russian special forces troops infiltrating across the border in a manner we are accustomed to seeing in a more conventional insurgency. These soldiers would be taking an advisory role in an effort to organize an opposition militia (Berzins notes an optimal 4:1 ratio of militia to special forces troops.²⁵) Depending on the political situation on the ground and ROE, NATO forces may or may not be able to engage these forces directly. If unable to challenge them directly, operational commanders must offer as much indirect assistance to the host nation as possible in the form of intelligence, ISR, logistics and advisors to ensure this threat is neutralized.

As the conflict develops, cyber warfare will likely become increasingly more essential as a war fighting means. Although theater commanders may not have direct control of the main cyber warfare effort, they should still make the best use of the organic cyber warfare capabilities attached to their commands. This may come in the form of forward deployed information dominance personnel directly supporting the operational commander in managing electronic communication, or by passing intelligence and suggesting targets and methods to higher echelon cyber forces. Operational commanders should dedicate significant

²⁵ Janis Berzins. “Russia’s New Generation Warfare in Ukraine.”

staff bandwidth to monitoring social media, blogs and message boards for trends to suggest areas of immediate concern, to monitor what General Gerasimov called the “protest potential of the population.”²⁶

Assuming these measures are successful, U.S. and NATO commanders need to be prepared to transition to stabilization operations and turn control back over to civil authority. We can expect that if we are able to blunt the Russian hybrid warfare attacks at any point on the spectrum, rather than quit they will likely retrograde back to phase one operations, returning to propaganda and strategic communications to reshape the battle space. If this happens, it is essential that NATO commanders assist the host nation forces in restoring stability and order as quickly as possible. General Gerasimov, in his article on Russian new methods of warfare, made clear that in today’s world, war often has no beginning and no end in a traditional sense, but is always developing at some stage in the background.²⁷ Because of this view, NATO commanders need to be ready to continue the fight at a lower tempo, rather than declare victory and go home. This also means utilizing host nation forces to constructively engage with the civil populations to win the hearts and minds of the people.

Timeliness of response

A recurring theme throughout the discussion of countering hybrid warfare is timeliness of response. Success in a hybrid warfare scenario will likely be determined primarily by how quickly commanders can act to counter Russian aggression. In Eastern

²⁶ Gerasimov, Valeri. “The Value of Science for the Future.”

²⁷ Gerasimov, Valeri. “The Value of Science for the Future.”

Europe and the Baltics, the old adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure is more than relevant. The earlier commanders can act, the more likely they will succeed.

NATO commanders should focus on countering and defeating the non-lethal forms of aggression that will likely form the beginning stages of any conflict in the Baltics before it morphs into full blown armed conflict. By countering Russian aggression while still in its non-lethal phases, conflict can be resolved before large scale destruction and loss of life occur. This means acting in defense of NATO member states well before the traditional lines of armed conflict are crossed, but this is much easier said than done. Article V of the NATO charter was designed to trigger a collective defense for armed attack of the territory of a member state, but that same article is ill equipped to respond to a modern hybrid warfare threat. Nadia Shadlow notes that, “Hybrid threats provide the “perfect” conundrum: the injection of so much uncertainty that NATO collapses under its own principle of allied consensus.”²⁸

If Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania were to come under Russian attack at any point on the hybrid war spectrum, (Lithuanian president Dalia Grybauskaite believes her country is already being subjected to the early stages of “informational war, propaganda and cyberattack”²⁹) it is essential that these countries and their NATO allies are prepared to respond appropriately, proportionately, and most important, expediently. Unfortunately, many in the Baltics believe that NATO will use the ambiguity surrounding Article V as an excuse not to act, or defer action until it is too late and Russia has already delivered a *fait*

²⁸ Nadia Shadlow, “The Problem with Hybrid Warfare.”

²⁹ Ibid.

*accompli.*³⁰ NATO commanders cannot allow this to happen. Doran and Grygiel hit on this concept when they wrote, “Deterring aggression against Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is far easier than attempting to defend them in an actual firefight. But such a defense is probably a lot more feasible than having to reverse military occupation involving the type of aggression and annexation to which Crimea has been subject.”³¹

Counter argument

Some might argue that the use of COIN principles in early stage hybrid warfare is the wrong course of action to take and that NATO would be better served to adopt a policy of observation and inaction in order to avoid antagonizing Russia, which could lead to an escalation of conflict between Russia and NATO. Through its rapid expansion east, into countries that have no bearing on the original NATO mission, western powers have already significantly damaged relations with Russia through perceived NATO aggression.³²

Because of the hazy and subtle nature of non-lethal conflict, it would be easy for NATO commanders to misread Russian intent and the level of Russian involvement in any non-military campaign. NATO commanders run a high risk of initiating actual hostilities if, through a faulty assessment, they attack Russian forces which are not directly involved in a conflict. Even legitimate attacks can be spun in the state controlled media to provide propaganda value to Russian speakers and create doubt in world opinion; as an example, an attack on a military convoy could be reported as an attack on a humanitarian aid convoy, an accusation that would be difficult to refute in a war zone. Because of the high level of

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Charles Doran and Jakub Grygiel. “Sanctions may push Russia to challenge the current status-quo.”

³² Ruhle, Michael. “NATO enlargement and Russia: myths and realities.” *NATO Review Magazine*.

uncertainty involved, it may be best for NATO to remain detached unless traditional armed conflict breaks out, requiring an Article V response.

As we have already seen, Vladimir Putin feels a strong connection with ethnic Russians living outside the bounds of the Russian Federation and is willing to act to bring them under Russian protection.³³ Russian incursions in Georgia, Moldova, Crimea and the Ukraine should leave no doubt that Putin will not hesitate to act if he feels he can bring expatriate Russians back into the state or under state protection. Any further aggressions by the West would give him an excuse to launch another campaign.

From a historical perspective, U.S. and NATO leaders need to be cognizant of the many parallels that can be drawn between Russia today and Japan of 1941. In 1941, as Japan attempted to enlarge its regional sphere of influence, western democracies attempted to deter Japanese aggression and expansionism through strong sanctions and weak strategic deterrence. In a massive strategic blunder, instead of deterring Japanese aggression against China, these actions from the west forced the Japanese to seek essential raw materials in Southeast Asia, expansion that required attacking American forces in the Philippines and Hawaii, igniting the war in the Pacific. Although Russia is not nearly as isolated as Japan was in 1941, western meddling inside the traditional Russian sphere of influence, coupled with recent economic sanctions, may have unintended consequences and could cause an unforeseen escalation in the conflict.³⁴

³³ *Associated press*. “Putin: Soviet collapse a ‘genuine tragedy.’”

³⁴ Charles Doran and Jakub Grygiel. “Sanctions may push Russia to challenge the current status-quo.”

Conclusions

Although the risks of acting are real, the risks of not acting and leaving our NATO allies on the eastern flank to face Russian aggression alone are far greater. If NATO failed to defend one of its member states, the political fallout could potentially be disastrous. Not only would the credibility of the organization be brought into question, but it could fracture the alliance politically, leading to an eventual collapse. It would also likely encourage further Russian aggressions in the region, giving them a blank check to expand their influence in the near abroad.

In the Baltic states, the battlefield of the future is truly in the minds of the populations, and NATO must be prepared to contest Russian aggression in this domain. The people of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as all Eastern European nations, need to see a unified western coalition that promises peace, stability and prosperity for their country, city and household. Russian phase one warfare will attempt to destroy that promise, and NATO commanders need to act swiftly and decisively, using the principles of COIN, to counter.

If NATO commanders and their staffs spend time understanding the Russian position and motives, and study the new Russian ideas of hybrid warfare, they can develop pre-planned responses to the non-lethal phases of warfare that will serve to both mitigate risk and ensure responses are timely, proportionate and appropriate. Using well developed counterinsurgency tools is a great foundation from which to expand as commanders and their staffs work to counter Russia's new form of warfare. By understanding the operating environment, developing a western (COIN) narrative, supporting overarching political goals and securing the population, NATO forces can defeat and contain Russian aggression against our NATO allies in Eastern Europe, but only if commanders can take appropriate action at an

early stage of the conflict. EUCOM and NATO forces in Eastern Europe have the strength and capability to stop Russian aggression in its tracks, but only if commanders have these preplanned responses in place, and understand when and how to use them.

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